

Kilgore House
411 Geneva Street
Opelika
Lee County
Alabama

HABS No. AL-891

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

KILGORE HOUSE

Location: 411 Geneva Street (between Avenue D and Torbert Boulevard), Opelika,
Lee County, Alabama

Present Owners: Jack E. and Darlene Heptinstall
Jap - McConnell Road
Opelika, Alabama, 36801

Present Use: Vacant - Single Family Residential

Significance: The Kilgore House is a good example of the hipped-roof raised cottage. This house type was popular throughout the Lower Chatahoochee Valley in south eastern Alabama and south western Georgia in the 1840's - 1860's. Typically, such cottages featured either Greek Revival or Italianate detail, and some times, as with the Kilgore house, an admixture of both. The four large French windows on the west elevation are one of its unique features, and are very unusual in this area, being more common in the coastal regions of the South.

The house is considered to be one of the oldest homes in Opelika and is located on the first paved residential street in the town. The original brick surface remains under the current asphalt paving of Geneva Street.

The Kilgore House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Geneva Street Historic District and is a candidate for individual inclusion on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** Possibly prior to 1869
2. **Architect:** Not known
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** The original owner of the house, at the time of construction, is not known. The earliest known deed, dated November 1, 1869, shows Mr. F. Hurst and his wife as owners. On this date the property, with a house standing on it, was purchased by Edward and Josephine Denniston. Whether the house referred to in the deed is the present structure remains open to question, although physical evidence suggests that it is. Mrs. Denniston later gained sole ownership of the property, presumably after her husband's death. On May 6, 1899, Mrs. Denniston sold the house to Lum and Inez Duke. However, the Duke family never occupied the house. On March 7, 1921, Lum Duke sold the house and lot to Joshephine Pope for the sum of one dollar. Miss Pope was reportedly the cousin of Edward Denniston who came over from Ireland in order to care for the Dennistons in their old age. Presumably, Miss Pope occupied the house while Lum Duke was its owner. On October 8, 1922, Miss Pope sold the house to J. A. Kilgore. Mr. Kilgore and his wife never had any children. Following their deaths, the house became part of a trust fund set up to provide for the education of Lee County youth. On June 23, 1988, the Kilgore house, along with three houses at the rear of the site, was purchased from the bank administering the trust fund by the current owners, Jack and Darlene Heptinstall.
4. **Suppliers:** None of the original materials of the house have any visible stamps or markings.
5. **Original plans and construction:** The original plans for the house are not available. Judging by the roof structure, changes in detail, style, and observations of other similar structures, the original house was a one story structure consisting of four rooms with a central hallway. The house is elevated on brick piers approximately five feet above ground level. A wood shingle hipped roof capped the building. The front porch similarly has a hipped roof which projects from the main facade at a point approximately 6 inches below the main roof.

As is typical of most mid-19th century structures, the Kilgore house was symmetrical. The primary facade (west elevation) has a central doorway, flanked by two French windows on either side. Both the north and south elevations have two double hung sash, six-over-six windows typical of the Greek Revival style. The rear elevation was probably similar to the front elevation, having a central doorway flanked by four windows. Although there

is no evidence remaining, there was probably a porch on this facade.

The interior of the original structure consisted of four rooms, two on either side of the central hallway. These rooms were of approximately equal dimensions and each pair was served by a double fireplace centrally located in the dividing wall. Each room probably had three windows, two opening into the front porch or rear porch of the house, and one centered in the side wall. On the wall opposite the side window, a doorway connected the room with the central hallway. Much of this original configuration still remains.

The exterior of the house is clad in overlapping wood weatherboarding. The interior walls and ceilings are plastered. Flooring is wide pine boards, which still remain under the more recent flooring.

6. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations and additions to the structure occurred in two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of enclosing the lower portion of the house to provide four additional rooms downstairs. Judging from the style of these extant baseboards and mantle, this phase probably occurred soon after the construction of the original house (ca. 1870's).

Spaces between the exterior piers were filled with courses of brick and windows were installed on the north and south facades. Paired fireplaces were added between adjoining rooms in the same manner as was found on the upper floor. The flooring for the lower story was probably wood boards laid over joists which were only slightly elevated off the ground by courses of brickwork. These courses ran the length of the house along the exterior and interior walls. A stairway was installed in the central hallway running from the south east corner of the upper hallway down to the center of the south wall of the lower hallway. It may also have been during this period that coal grates were installed in the upstairs and downstairs fireplaces.

The second phase of construction occurred sometime between 1909 and 1924, adding a five room addition to the rear of the house (east elevation). This addition is approximately the same width as the original house, but is offset so that it projects beyond the original building wall on the north. The central hallway was extended, with a bathroom, kitchen and pantry built on the south side of the hall. Two large rooms (probably bedrooms) were added on the north side of the extended hall. At the same time, the downstairs portion was taken out of daily use. The flooring downstairs was removed, along with the stairway that connected the two floors. The upstairs was refloored with narrow oak boards. Some of these removed materials were said to have been used in the construction of the three houses that share the rear of the site.

Several other changes have been made to the house that are difficult to date. It is believed that these changes occurred at the same time or after the second phase of additions. The front portion of the original house has been

replastered; the original smooth finish being replaced with a sand textured plaster. The front porch has had a concrete slab floor poured, two of the columns have been replaced with wrought iron columns, and hollow cast iron rails have been installed. The south chimney has also been replaced. The original steps to the main floor at the rear elevation have been replaced with concrete block stairs.

- B. **Historical Context:** The Kilgore House is located in Opelika, Alabama. Opelika is on the Piedmont Plateau, at the highest point between Atlanta, Georgia and New Orleans, Louisiana. The area was a native home for the Creek Indians, possibly selected by them because of a great abundance of free-flowing water from limestone springs. The Creeks retained the land until it was ceded to the Federal Government by treaty in 1832.

The town of Opelika was first incorporated in 1854, but it was not until 1866 that the county of Lee was formed from lands that had previously been part of several surrounding counties. The county was named for the Civil War General Robert E. Lee. Opelika was selected as the county seat, and retains this distinction today.

Because of its advantages of transportation and natural resources, Opelika flourished after the Civil War. In 1870, as part of an effort to regain self-rule from Reconstruction forces, the town successfully petitioned for a new charter and officially became Opelika.

The house is located on the first paved residential street in Opelika, with Geneva Street still retaining its original brick paving under the current asphalt. The Geneva Street area is the oldest residential district in town and was considered Opelika's affluent neighborhood at the time that most of the original homes were built.

The "Southside", of which the Kilgore house is a part, later fell out of favor with the subsequent residents of Opelika, and the area north of the current C&S Railroad line became the place to reside.

Unfortunately, many of the original homes in the Geneva Street Historic District have been destroyed, or are currently endangered by neglect. Adding to this condition is the proposal of new public improvement projects that would lead to the demolition of numerous houses in order to widen Geneva Street to approximately five lanes and for the installation of a new connector street, bisecting Geneva Street from east to west.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. **Architectural character:** Overall, the Kilgore house shows influence of the late Greek Revival style of architecture. The symmetry of the building, as well as the classical proportions, are both hallmarks of this style. Specific elements of the house typifying greek revivalism are the double hung sash, six-over-six windows, the modified greek key over the front entrance, and the denticulated cornice in the pediment over the front door.

Elements of the Italianate, or Bracketed, Style are also present. These elements include the large brackets at the front door, the circular motif also found at the front door treatment, the rather ornate original chimney on the north side of the house, and the eight foot high French windows along the principle facade.

The blending of these two styles tends to indicate that the house was built some time in the late 1850s or 1860s. A local craftsman using pattern books of the period was probably the architect for this vernacular house.

2. **Condition of the fabric:** The foundation of the house is in fair condition. Although most of the exterior piers are in good condition, the brick infill between these piers is severely deteriorated, especially on the east elevation. As a result of capillary action, many of the bricks are spalling and, in some instances, have crumbled to dust. The same problem has occurred in the brickwork of the one original chimney. All of the supporting beams and joists appear to be in sound condition, although the interior walls of the lower floor are completely unsupported in some areas.

The exterior clapboard siding and wood trim are almost all intact and solid. One board on the north-east corner is missing, and ivy growth in this area is beginning to damage the siding. The stucco on the lower walls of the original portion of the building is stained and cracked in places.

The roof is primarily in good condition. The metal roof is rusting in some spots and is showing signs of wear, but as far as can be determined, there are currently no leaks.

Although none of the windows are missing, many have lost one or more panes. The southern most French window on the west elevation has recently lost its top left quarter in a storm (the frame is in the house, but the panes were shattered). Several of the lower story windows on the north elevation are being severely damaged by ivy growth.

The roof and floor of the front porch are in good condition, but the four remaining wooden columns are being damaged by the weather. The cement steps on the west elevation are in bad condition.

On the interior, the floors in several rooms have been subject to water damage as a result of missing panes in the windows. The floor in the kitchen is rotten and the floor in the bathroom is deteriorating. Ceilings throughout the house are in good condition with the exception of a few cracks in the plaster. The plaster walls on the interior are generally in good condition, except downstairs where large sections of the plaster have fallen.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** Because of the addition, the raised cottage is now asymmetrical in form. The original building measures approximately 44'-5" across the front and about 38'-6" deep, including the 6'-0" wide porch. The addition, which was built off center, extends beyond from the north facade about 8'-8", and is approximately 18'-0" wide.
2. **Foundations, Structural System and Framing:** The foundation has brick piers, 1'-4" by 1'-4", with brick infill. The original portion is of timber frame construction. The sills in the original portion are roughly 12 inches square, and the posts are pegged into these sills. The newer portion of the house is of balloon frame construction.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls on the upper floor are of overlapping wood weatherboarding painted white. A small wooden drip-course extends at the base of these walls. The upper floor overhangs the lower floor by approximately 2 inches.

The lower floor has red brick piers with brick infill laid in a running bond. The foundation walls under the original house have been stuccoed on the north, west and south elevations.

4. **Porches, Stoops and Balconies:** The entrance porch is 6'-0" wide and runs the length of the front elevation. The floor is cast concrete. The steps approaching the porch are stuccoed brick with cast concrete treads. The ceiling of the porch is 1.5" tongue and groove boards. The porch has four wooden tuscan columns and two later wrought iron replacement columns. Railings are hollow cast iron pipe (also a later addition).
5. **Chimneys:** A chimney structure, located at the interior wall separating the paired rooms, occurs on each side of the central hall. Both chimneys have openings on each side of the paired rooms, giving all four rooms in the original structure a fireplace. They also serve the four corresponding

fireplaces on the lower floor. The chimney on the north is original to the house and has decorative brickwork at the top. The chimney on the south is a later replacement and is plain. Both are of red brick.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways: Typical doors are 3'-0" by 6'-9", two or four panel, and stained brown. Trim on the first floor is 3.75" in width; on the lower floor 4.5" in width. The door at the rear of the main hall, leading from the original building to the newer portion, is approximately 4'-0" in width. It appears to have originally been in another structure, cut down to a height of 6'-10", and installed in its current location.

b. Windows and Shutters: The house has two distinct window types. The front elevation has four french windows with six lights and two wooden panels below. These windows measure 3'-5" wide by 8'-9.5". The other windows in the house are typical 6 over 6, double sash windows. The top sash is fixed. These windows measure 3'-3.5" by 7'-1.5". A small 2'-4" by 2'-9.5" window is found in the pantry in the newer portion of the house. There are green wooden shutters on the lower floor windows. These shutters are fully louvered and probably are not original.

7. **Roof:** The roof of the original structure is a hipped metal roof with sawn wooden shingles underneath. The addition to the house has a gable roof running parallel to the original structure and is of the same material. The gables have a wood shingle drip at the base.

C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The upper floor consists of nine rooms. In the original portion of the house, there are four rooms of roughly equal dimensions flanking a central hallway. In the newer addition, there is a kitchen, pantry and bathroom on the south side of the hallway extension. There are two rooms (probably bed rooms) on the north side of this hallway.

b. Lower floor: A central hallway runs east/west on the lower story. The original portion of this floor has four rooms corresponding to the rooms upstairs. In the newer portion, there is a room on the south side of the hallway underneath the kitchen and bath. The area on the north of the hall extension was used as a garage and for coal storage.

2. **Stairway:** Originally there was a stairway connecting the first floor with the lower floor in the central hallway. This stairway was removed, but the ceiling

cut and the supports still remain visible in the lower story.

3. **Flooring:** Original flooring of wide pine boards, replaced with thinner oak boards when the addition to the rear was made (1909 - 1924). Linoleum covers the rear hallway, kitchen and bath. Original floor is still visible in the closet of the NE room of the original portion of the house.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** All of the interior walls are plaster over wood lath. The walls in the original portion of the upper floor have a rough finish typical of the craftsman style. Plaster walls in the addition upstairs and downstairs have a smooth finish. Ceilings upstairs are plaster and have no ornamentation. Downstairs ceilings are wooden boards stained red to match the baseboards and mantles.
5. **Decorative features and trim:** The interior of the Kilgore house is relatively spartan. On the first floor, there is a base board in the older portion and 8.5" high one in the newer portion. This baseboard is stained dark brown to match the doors. A double-ogee picture rail runs 1'-7" from the ceiling throughout the house. The trim around the windows and doors is equally plain and measures 5.5" and 4" respectively.

A glassfront bookcase measuring 3'-9.5" by 4'-6.25" has been installed in the interior wall south of the fireplace in the dining room, the room on the southwest corner of the house. On the other side of this wall, in the parlor, a cabinet measuring 4'-4" by 6'-9.5" was built into the wall. This cabinet has glass doors on the upper portion and wooden doors on the lower portion.

None of the fireplace mantels upstairs are original. They have been replaced by ones that are extremely plain and consist of a two bracket shelf on a wood facing.

The only decorative feature of note downstairs is the fireplace mantle which appears to be original. Their style is typical greek revival, but the proportions are somewhat unusual. The mantles are not particularly elaborate and consist of two pilasters roughly 3' tall with a 1'-4" entablature. Most of the openings have been bricked in and stuccoed, and a grate for burning coal installed.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

The Kilgore house is located in the Geneva Street Historic District and is listed as part of the district on the National Register. The Geneva Street District begins at the south corner of South Ninth Street and Avenue C, proceeds along the west side of Ninth south east to Geneva Street, then along

the west side of Geneva Street south to Stowe Avenue, then north along the east side of Geneva Street to Torbert Boulevard. The district boundary then includes the south side of Torbert Boulevard as it proceeds east to South Eight Street, then north west along Eight Street to Avenue E, then north east along Avenue E to South Seventh Street, then north west to include the west side of Seventh Street to Avenue C, then west along Avenue C, including only the south side except for the Confederate Monument at the triangle that Avenue C forms with Geneva and Eighth, to the point of beginning. The district area includes 33.6 acres and is found on the U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series, Opelika West Quadrangle and Opelika East Quadrangle. The district is made up of private ownership, commercial, park, and residential zones. Access is unrestricted with a status of occupied, unoccupied and work in progress. There are 80 houses listed in the district of which the Kilgore house is listed as #33.

The front facade of the Kilgore house faces west and is visible from Geneva Street.

2. **Historic Landscape Design:** Unknown.
3. **Outbuildings:** No original outbuildings remain. There are three small bungalows (ca. 1920) on the rear portion of the property. Originally, these were probably rental units and remain so today.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Mrs. Charles M. Canon, Jr., Opelika Historic Preservation Society

Mr. Robert Gamble, Architectural Historian, Alabama Historical Commission, Montgomery, Alabama.

B. Published sources:

Lee County Deed Books and Probate Records, Lee County Courthouse, Opelika, Alabama.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service listing Geneva Street Historic District, 1981.

Lee County Historic Sites Inventory, 1981.

Robert Gamble, The Alabama Catalog; Historic American Buildings Survey, a guide to the Early Architecture of the State.

C. Maps:

National Register Boundary Map: Geneva Street Historic District, Opelika, Alabama.

Ownership Maps: Lee County, Alabama.

Planimetric Maps: City of Opelika, Alabama.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: Opelika - 1909 and 1924.

General Highway Maps, State of Alabama: Chambers County, Lee County, Macon County and Russell County.

United States Geological Survey: Opelika West Quadrangle and Opelika East Quadrangle.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the School of Architecture at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. The project was supervised by Kimberly E. Harden, AIA, with the assistance of Sam R. Coker, Michael R. South and David L. Wallace. The project was completed by students in the undergraduate architecture program, and the graduate programs of planning and of history:

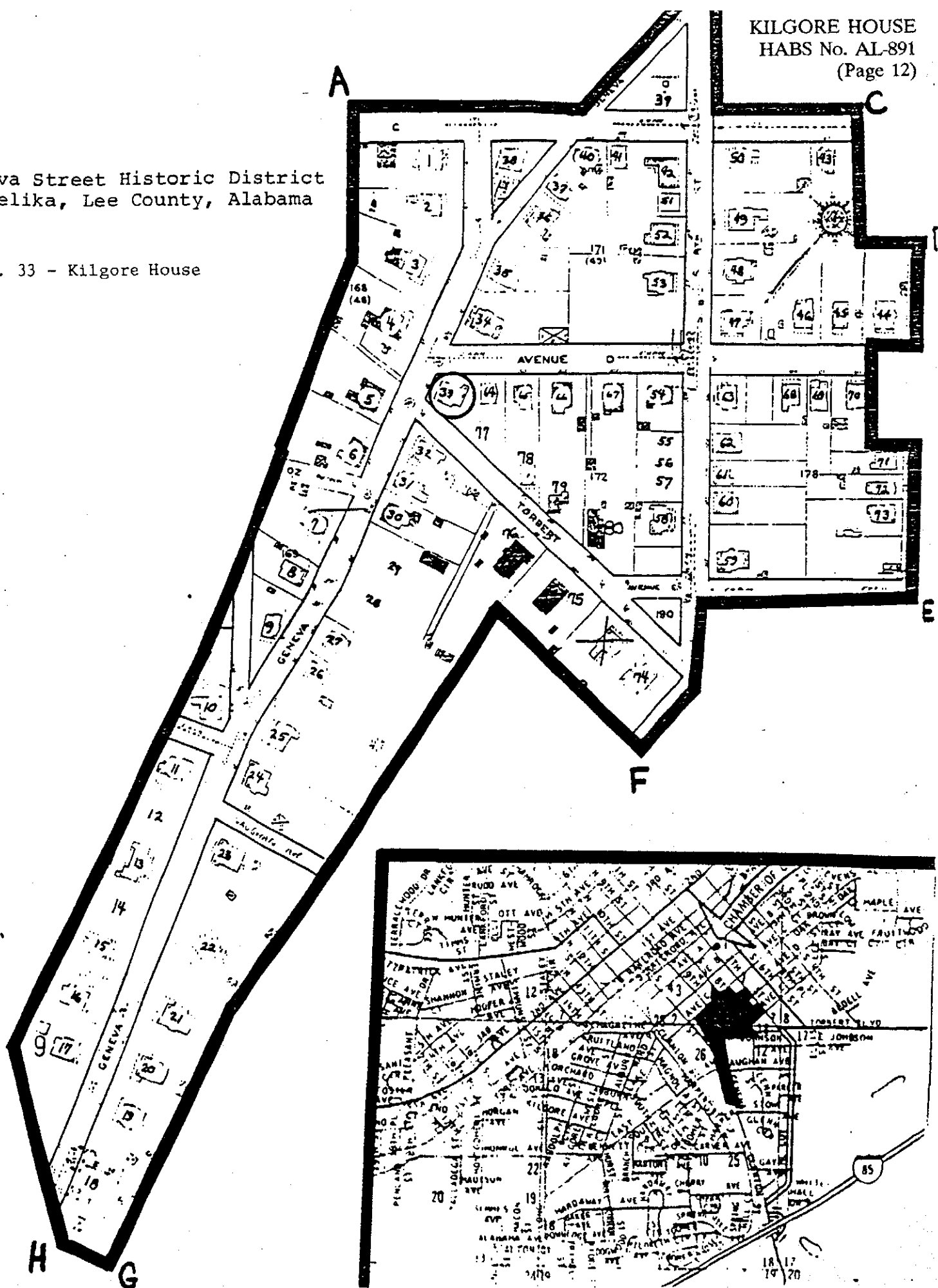
Peter R. Cranton (AR/MCP)
Murray W. Fancher (LA/MCP)
Amy Jones (AR)
Gillian Lewis (AR)
Robert Pich (AR)
James L. Sledge (MHY/MCP)
Charles Upchurch (AR)
Thomas Wayne Williams (AR)
Thaddeus T. Yonke (AR/MCP)

Historical Research was compiled by James L. Sledge, with the assistance of Robert Gamble, Architectural Historian, Alabama Historical Commission, and edited by Kimberly E. Harden, AIA. Photography was provided by Murray W. Fancher.

This documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1990.

Geneva Street Historic District
Opelika, Lee County, Alabama

No. 33 - Kilgore House



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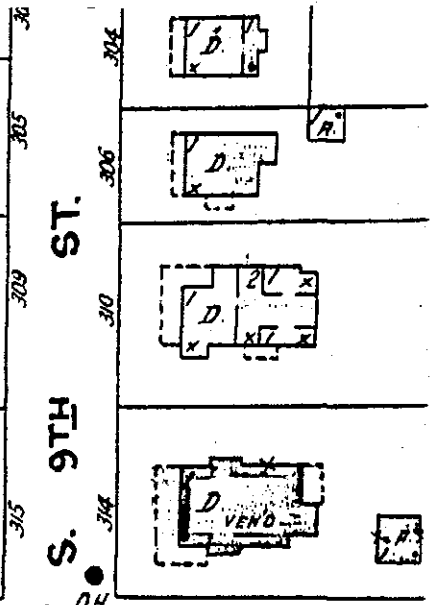
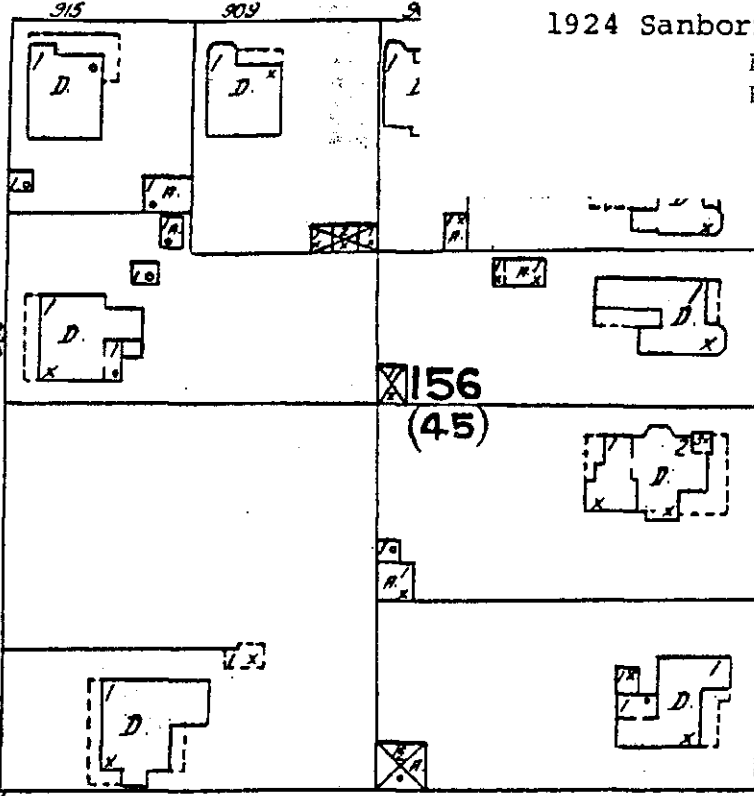
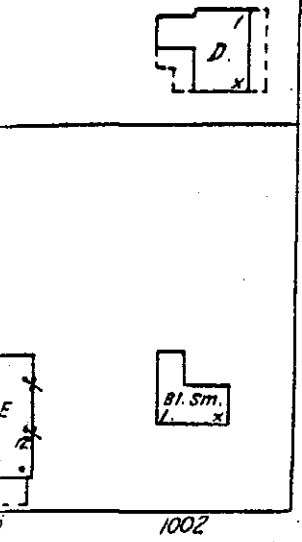
1924 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

KILGORE HOUSE

HABS No. AL-891

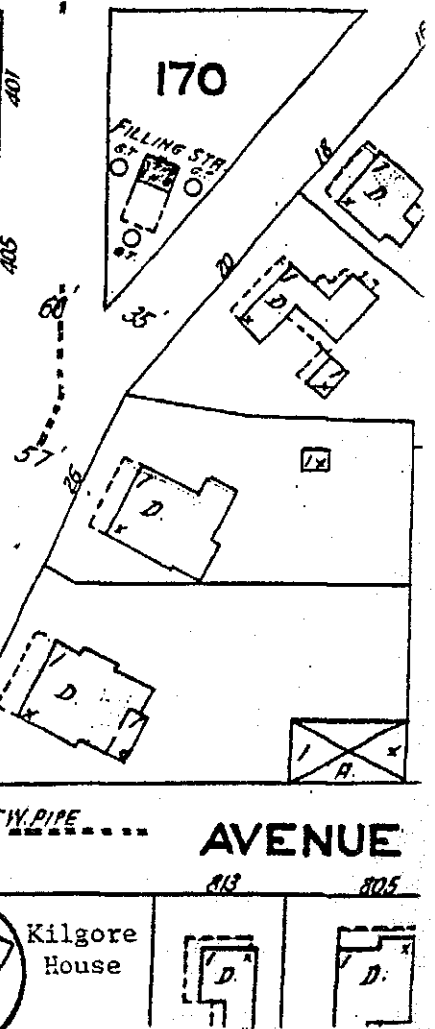
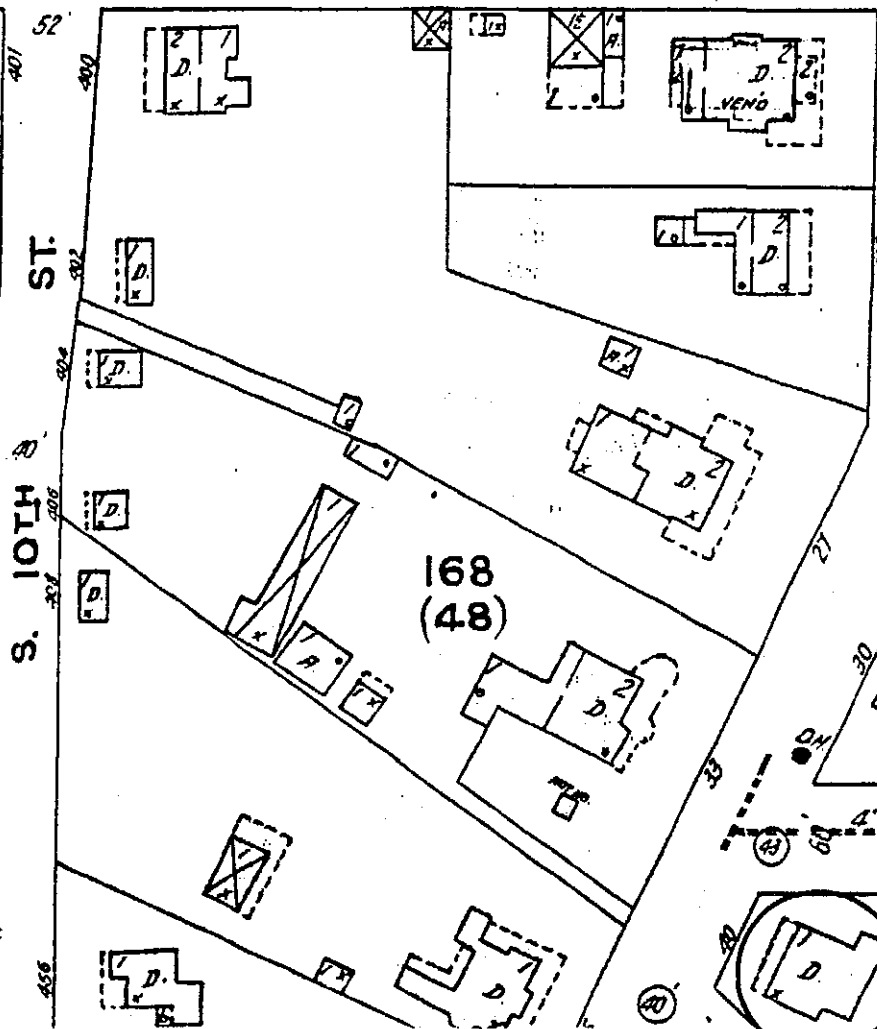
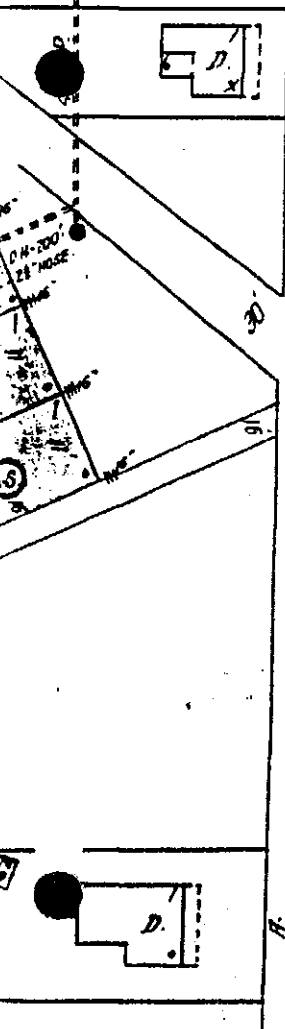
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